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ABSTRACT

In response to problems with the cyclical model of program review and reduced state and county funding, Burlington County College (BCC), in New Jersey, implemented a comprehensive analysis process to holistically assess program performance and resource allocation. First, program review goals were established and the major programs/services at BCC and their functions were identified. Next, four task forces comprised of students, faculty, support staff, community members, and administrators were established to focus on academic programs, student services, community/business services, and institutional support, respectively. Once the task forces were formed, chairs agreed on guidelines for prioritizing services with respect to the allocation of limited resources. The task force on academic programs met twice a week to review enrollment trends, costs, semester hour patterns, the number of full-time faculty, adjunct rates, and support services and in its final report recommended the expansion, reduction, or elimination of academic programs, and other task forces followed similar procedures. Strengths of the holistic review process were that it integrated different task force recommendations, and thus the points of view of various constituents, so that decisions were made after the overall needs of BCC were reviewed. While the program functioned very well, some areas for improvement were identified--such as the need to place a greater emphasis on specific outcomes, create a narrower focus for the task forces, and develop a core of common measures across task forces. Task force guidelines and objectives are included. (ECC)

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Comprehensive Analysis

A Holistic Approach to Program Review

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Burlington County College

Comprehensive Analysis: A Holistic Approach to Program Review

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Introduction

Program Review in the United States

According to Conrad and Wilson, institutions of higher education approach the process of program review with considerable variability. They conduct program reviews for different purposes and select programs for review in several ways. Institutions use a variety of evaluative criteria; and choose reviewers from different sources. Lastly, the methods implemented vary from one institution to another.

The purpose of program review is overwhelmingly program improvement. However, in many cases other purposes such as responding to state and or federal mandates, providing a blue print for resource allocation, or reacting to community and other constituencies act as the stimulants. The selection of programs is another area where there is diversity. Some institutions select a limited number of programs for review each year where others cluster the reviews. Some institutions, select a program for review because of a specific problem or issue, i.e. low enrollment.

Overview of Burlington's Process

Burlington County College like many higher education institutions reviews its programs every five years. We found two problems with this cyclical program specific approach. First, we altered the five year schedule because of particular program problems such as low enrollment, costs, etc. Secondly, we found that we were not getting an overall picture of how our academic programs compare to each other and how they impact as a whole on the mission and goals of the college.

Dr. Messina, President of Burlington County College, was concerned about whether the college could continue to meet its mission and goals in light of reduced funding from the state and the county. To address this concern, he implemented the comprehensive analysis process. The process addressed academic programs, student services, community and

business relations, and institutional support services. All programs were reviewed using the same criteria.

As a result of our work, we found that our comprehensive analysis, because of its holistic approach to program review, was a viable alternative to cyclical program review. This analysis gave us a view of how the programs were operating in light of the mission and goals of the college, the college's resources, and student performance.

Information Covered in Presentation

Our presentation will provide an overview of the process that we used in the comprehensive analysis. We will discuss the results and the plans that were established for making improvements in the academic area. Finally we will discuss some of the changes in the academic area that have resulted from the analysis.

Planning The Process

Procedures

The Comprehensive Analysis at Burlington County College was a college wide effort which included the review of academic programs. Prior to establishing the task forces considerable planning was done to set goals for the process, to develop a timeline, determine the major programs and services of the college and identify the functions of those programs and services. Data was collected, compiled and analyzed. This information was then submitted to external consultants for review and comment.

Although the President spearheaded the comprehensive analysis, the Executive Director of Research and Planning was given responsibility for implementing the process. The Executive Director's major responsibility was to work with the task forces that were responsible for the review of the programs and services.

Task Forces

Based on the identification of the programs and services of the college, four task forces were established. They were the Academic Programs, the Student Services, Community and Business Services, and Institutional Support Task Forces.

Each task force included representatives from currently enrolled students, faculty, support staff, community and administration. The number of individuals from the representative groups varied by the nature and focus of the

task force. For example, there were three faculty on the Academic Programs Task Force and one on the Community Service Task Force.

The task force chairpersons were selected by the President. These chairpersons included people who had experience in the program or service area. In addition, they were skilled at conducting meetings, possessed leadership qualities, and were experienced at writing reports/grants, etc. The Director of Testing and Academic Assessment chaired the Academic Programs Task Force. This individual had teaching and administrative experience at the college. She worked with faculty in several capacities, including establishing goals and objectives for the academic programs and preparing outcome measures for those goals.

Goals of the Comprehensive Analysis

Most institutions of higher education conduct program reviews to improve the quality of programs or services. However, according to Conrad and Wilson, "... a growing number of institutions have embraced the reallocation of resources ... as the driving force behind program review." (Conrad and Wilson, 1985, pg. 12) Many have utilized both program improvement and resource allocation. Like this latter group, Burlington addressed both program improvement and resource allocation as the major goals of the comprehensive analysis.

In addition to improvement and resource allocation, Burlington also wanted to integrate evaluation with the decision-making structures of the college. The comprehensive analysis would permit the use of the results and recommendations in the planning and budgeting process. The final result was to reduce the anxiety of the college community from the drastic cutbacks in funding from the state. By involving the entire college constituency in the process, we hoped that individuals would gain an understanding of the needs of all programs and services. In addition, they would be a part of reallocating resources rather than focusing on cutting programs and services.

Timeline

The Executive Director of Research and Planning developed a timeline for the Comprehensive Analysis. This was reviewed by the President's Executive Staff. Several changes were made by this group. Basically, the process for the task forces began March 6, 1992 and ended May 1, 1993 with the completion of their final report.

Implementing The Process

Once the procedures, timeline, and goals of the Comprehensive Analysis were completed, the President selected the four task force chairpersons and personally invited them to serve. The Executive Director of Research and Planning coordinated the efforts of these individuals throughout the process.

Orientation of the Task Force Chairpersons

The President called the first meeting of the chairpersons and the Executive Director of Research and Planning. At that meeting, the President explained the process and its overall goals. He led a discussion of the group to determine how the task forces could effectively complete their tasks. He encouraged each chair to ask hard questions about the various programs and services.

The President asked the Executive Director of Research and Planning to distribute the reports of the budget managers to each chairperson. These reports included data about the various programs and services of the college. They were completed by the budget managers of those programs. The chairs agreed to meet again before starting the comprehensive analysis process. The purpose of the second meeting was to establish guidelines under which the task forces would operate.

Task Force Guidelines

The Comprehensive Analysis Guidelines included a purpose statement and objectives. They were reviewed by the task force chairpersons and approved. Each task force also reviewed the objectives and made revisions which were relevant to their area. A copy of the guidelines is included on the next page of this report.

The task force chairs agreed that the meetings of all task forces were open to the entire college community. The meeting schedules were published in the College Connection, the college newsletter. The chair of each committee was responsible for keeping minutes. They sent copies of the minutes to the Executive Director of Research and Planning.

Comprehensive Analysis

Task Force Guidelines

Purpose: We are all aware of the difficult economic conditions under which the college has and must continue to operate. In light of the limited funding from the state, we need to review all of the programs, services and functions of the college to determine what we can and should continue to offer. It is the purpose of this task force to make recommendations to the President for the allocation of future resources to these program/services services. The recommendations should also include alternatives to the service/ functions, etc., which would be more cost effective.

Objectives:

1. Hold and organizational meeting to review these guidelines and establish a meeting schedule.

2. Review the report for accuracy and further clarification. This may involve calling in individuals to answer questions or provide additional information.

3. Determine the measurable contribution of each program/service to the mission and goals of the college. A copy of the mission and goals is attached. In addition, a copy of the outcomes for the New Jersey College Outcomes and Evaluation Program (COEP) project are included as examples of measurable contributions.

4. Determine the measurable impact (career, personal development and academic) of these programs/services on students.

5. Determine the measurable contributions of this program/service on the community.

6. Categorize each function as to whether these college services should be increased, maintained at the current level, or decreased. The task force must balance where it is recommending increasing resources with reductions in other areas. The intent is to reallocate resources from areas of low priority to those of high priority within the task force jurisdiction.

7. Determine across all of the programs and services falling within the purview of the task force, how one could continue to provide the essential functions of this area if the college had to reduce total financing to the area by 15 percent.

8. Prepare recommendations from the material gained in items 2-7.

Academic Programs Task Force

Description of the Programs and Services Addressed

This particular task force had to address two areas, academic programs and general education. The Director of Testing and Academic Assessment and the Executive Director of Research and Planning developed a list of data needed which were relevant to the academic programs and general education. The Academic Deans completed the data for both areas. The Executive Director of Research and Planning provided a disk with a template to the Academic Deans. This disk provided the format for the reports and assured consistency in reporting across the academic divisions. The college printed the Academic Programs and General Education documents. The chair of the Academic Task Force then distributed the documents to the members of the task force.

The Academic Programs document included all AAS career programs. These programs include general education courses and program specific courses. The college does not apply these program specific courses toward general education. The General Education document includes all programs that come under the AA or AS degree. The college counts many of the courses relevant to these programs as general education credit in other programs. Thus the enrollments are usually not dependent on the number of students in the programs. For example, the college offers sociology as a program. In addition, several sociology courses apply toward the general education requirement. Elimination of such programs might limit some specific course offerings, but the core of that program's courses would remain. The programs in the two areas are listed on the following pages.

List of Academic Programs Reviewed

Communications Arts
Criminal Justice
Graphic Arts Technology
Photography
Accounting
Business Administration/Management
Computer Science
Legal Technology
Hospitality Management
Office Systems
*Medical Laboratory Technology
Medical Record Technology
Nursing
Electronics Engineering Technology &
Computer Integrated Manufacturing (CIM)
Automotive Technology

*This program is on hold. We are not enrolling students.

List of General Education Disciplines Reviewed

Humanities/History
Social Sciences
Written Communication
Oral Communication
Foreign Languages
Biology
Chemistry
Physical Science/Geography/Geology
Mathematics
Physics
Health & Physical Education

The task force chairperson sent a letter to each member announcing the date and time of the first meeting. The task force members also received a copy of the guidelines, the timeline, the College's mission and goals, and the Comprehensive Analysis FY 1992 Academic Programs and General Education documents.

Task Force Membership

The task force included 3 faculty, 3 administrators (one of which was a division dean), 1 student, and 1 representative from the community. In addition, the task force asked the Assistant Deans to attend our meetings to act as resources for the programs in their academic divisions. The Executive Director of Research and Planning attended most of the meetings and was helpful in providing more information about the fall, 1991 adjuncts and course semester hours for all courses from 1985-86 to 1990-91.

Process of the Task Force

At our first meeting, the task force reviewed the guidelines, established a meeting schedule, and reviewed the mission and goals of the college. They also decided that they would review the Academic Programs document first and then review the General Education document. The latter part of the meeting was spent reviewing the Communication Arts program. The task was difficult because it was the first program to be analyzed. We decided to use this review as a model for the other programs. From the review of the Communication Arts program the committee listed 16 issues that could be addressed in the review of the other programs. The issues are listed below:

1. Does the program contribute to many goals of the college?
2. Is there a steady increase in enrollment?
3. Is the new student enrollment increasing?
4. Do the students have a high pass rate?
5. What is the percentage of adjuncts teaching courses in the program?
6. Is the program budget included in with other budgets or is it a separate budget?
7. What is the cost breakdown?
8. What is the possible articulation agreements?
9. Is there a need for an advisory committee?
10. Is the equipment supported by program budget or another budget?
11. Is there a coordinator, other support persons, etc.?
12. Are courses in this program required with any other programs?

13. Would it be feasible to offer this program with another community college?
14. Could these courses be offered in conjunction with community services?
15. Can courses not offered be deleted, provided that no student needs the course(s) to graduate?
16. Do students tend to graduate or take blocks of courses?

The task force reviewed the colleges general education requirements in light of the NJ State General Education Requirements. We then reviewed the programs based on the objectives in the guidelines. Some rather interesting and heated discussions took place about what courses should count as general education. The main concern of the committee was that there were two many course options which could count toward general education. Many of the options were not really general education, such as advanced chemistry and calculus.

The task force quickly realized that they could not meet the objectives in the guidelines unless they met at least twice a week. Each member agreed that they would have to read the materials before the meetings, so that the meeting time would be spent working on the objectives. In addition, they found the information in the documents to be difficult to compare and contrast or evaluate in that format. They agreed that the information had to be put in a table format. The chair of the task force agreed to complete those tables. The tables were very useful in reviewing the academic programs in a holistic fashion rather than program by program.

The Final Report

The task force reported their accomplishment of each of the objectives listed in the guidelines. The most significant part of the report dealt with Objectives 6-8. These objectives covered recommendations and funding determination, i.e., increase, decrease, or stay the same.

The task force used many criteria to make their classification decisions. They reviewed the enrollment trends, the costs, the semester hour patterns, the number of full-time faculty, the rate of adjunct usage, and the amount of support services. Members held discussions with the Assistant Deans from each of the academic divisions.

Generally, the recommendations covered such issues as reduced funding to some programs, expansion of some programs, elimination of programs, course deletions, core curriculum, joint community service and credit offerings, and use of interactive video and computers in basic skills.

Impact of the Process

Strengths

One strength of the Comprehensive Analysis is that it allows for the integration of the recommendations with the planning and budgeting process of the college. The recommendations are reviewed and implemented only after a look at the overall needs of the college. For example, the Program Review Task Force recommended that the Hospitality Management program be eliminated because of the high cost, its low enrollment, and competition with a neighboring community college culinary arts program. However, this program supports the cafeteria service, particularly the Cranberry Room. This is an area where patrons select their meal from a menu and the food is served. The food is good and the college community supports the quiet and attractive location for lunch. Before a decision is made to eliminate the Hospitality Program, the issue of the Cranberry Room needs to be addressed. This is an issue that the Institutional Services Task Force should also explore.

Another strength of the process was that it involved people from various constituents. This brought a new dimension to the academic review process. Faculty tend to be rather insular and defensive about making hard decisions about programs. However, this did not happen because of the wide representation on the committee. The task force recommended that the Office Systems and the Medical Laboratory Technology programs be discontinued. The task force also recommended that the existing general education requirements be revised. They made specific recommendation that the options be reduced and that a core of courses be determined. They also recommended that the college assess its health and physical education requirement. Many students transfer before graduating so that they do not have to take the health or physical education courses. Students frequently report that these courses do not transfer into four year schools.

One advantage of involving all constituents of the college is that problems can be solved with joint department cooperation. There were two problem programs at the college, music and basic skills reading. The major problem with music was the high cost and low enrollment. However, there was a need for this particular group of students. The problem with the basic skills reading program was the wide range of deficiencies in students, particularly at the lower end. In both of these situations the Office of Community Services and the academic areas worked together to offer joint classes in music for credit and non-credit. Now music

courses could be offered for credit when enrollment was low because the non-credit enrollment offset the costs. It also increased the non-credit offerings and revenue.

In the case of the basic skills reading program, the lowest level of reading as determined by the NJ College Basic Skills Placement Test is now offered by the Office of Community Services. A review of student outcomes, curriculum, and course sequencing resulted in a change from a two course offering to a four course offering. The lowest course offering is offered through Community Services rather than the college's credit offerings. This level is for students who are reading below the seventh grade level. Community Services has faculty and the computer lab with appropriate software for this very basic instruction. They have received several grants from the state of New JERSEY for job training. Many of these students will not have the perseverance to work through all of the levels of reading and then complete a two year degree. However, it is believed that such students could be encouraged to go into specific job areas and improve their reading as well.

The Academic Task Force members felt that the comprehensive analysis allowed for input by individuals who have expertise and who have an interest in the result of the review. Another strength is that the process was designed in such a way that it did not become a long drawn out process. It was focused with clear time parameters. This really kept the task force on task. However, members of the task force felt that they needed more time to discuss the academic program and general education. They wanted to discuss the issues in more depth.

Weaknesses

In general the process functioned very well and met our goals. However, there were three areas which we need to address in the next analysis. These include placing a greater emphasis on specific outcomes, creating a narrower focus, and developing a core of common measurement parameters across task forces. In order to implement the above, it will be necessary to provide training in outcomes assessment to the participants. In order to narrow the focus, the academic task force would be divided into two task forces; one to the review the academic programs and the other to review general education. This would permit more in-depth discussion of each of these areas.

Conclusion

The Comprehensive Analysis was successful in meeting its goals. In spite of the financial cut backs and the projected cut backs, the college has not had to terminate any programs which affected a persons employment or prevented a student from achieving a degree. It has provided the stimulus for future discussion and debate that has crossed all constituencies of the college. In particular, the academic senate and the academic divisions are developing a core curriculum. It has resulted in improvements in the music program and the basic skills reading program. Over half of the faculty have received a computer for his/her office and has access to training in DOS, Microsoft Word 5.5, and Lotus. The plans for an electronic classroom are underway. The math lab for computation and elementary algebra is up and functioning. Studies already show an improvement in the pass rate for those classes that are using the lab and its technology. Lastly, no one has been laid off and the moral of the campus is positive.

Reference

Conrad, Clifton F. and Wilson, Richard F. 1985. Academic Program Reviews Institutional Approaches, Exceptions, and Controversies. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 5, 1985.